

Mr. Speaker, President Ronald Reagan was correct when he said that "Men cry 'peace, peace,' but there can be no peace as long as there is some American somewhere dying for the rest of us."

Sergeant Williams was one of those Americans. He gave all, dying for the rest of us. It was his devotion that thrust him into battle with his eyes wide open. He knew that there was a chance he wouldn't come home. He told his sister that he was fighting for her so that she could enjoy freedom. His level of devotion meant giving himself after giving his all. His life is the cost of freedom, a freedom and an expense that he embraced proudly.

Every member of the military we remember here on the House floor is described in those remarks as someone who loved his country, a soldier to the bone who believed in what they were doing. And that is tracking terrorists and ripping those terrorists from their roots so people around the world would know the blessings of liberty and the security of self-government that Thomas Jefferson wrote about in the Declaration of Independence.

We call ourselves patriots, but few of us have the scars to prove it. Few have the courage to face and embrace the darkest unknown, the possibility of not going home.

These few, these volunteers, are a rich testament to the courage they have in their hearts. Now and always we must remember their sacrifice, our men and women who fight, so we can look in the blue skies of liberty and remember them with the flying of every star and every stripe.

So this 4th of July, we remember all of those who served, all of them that gave some and those that gave all.

So Semper Fi, Ben Williams. Semper Fi.

And that's just the way it is.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

VOTING RIGHTS ACT REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, last week, the Republican leadership decided to pull the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization legislation from the floor. Debate on this historic civil rights statute had been scheduled for last Wednesday afternoon, and just hours before it was to start, the bill was withdrawn from consideration.

As a cosponsor of this important bill, I am deeply troubled by the majority leadership's willingness to allow extreme members of their party to hijack reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act, a law that has protected minority voters from intimidation and discrimination for 40 years. It was an act unbecoming a party that calls itself the "Party of Lincoln."

The original Voting Rights Act reinforced the Constitution's 15th amendment guarantee that race cannot be a bar to any citizen's right to vote. Although the 15th amendment was ratified in 1870, it took nearly 100 years for Congress to give it teeth with the Voting Rights Act. Until then, the rights of millions of Americans to vote was nullified by poll taxes, literacy tests, voter intimidation, and outright violence. Only in 1965, with the passage of the Voting Rights Act, were African Americans finally able to exercise the right to vote. But the path to this legislation was by no means easy.

On March 7, 1965, what has become known as Bloody Sunday, 600 civil rights marchers peacefully protested for the right to vote. Upon reaching the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, the marchers were attacked by State and local police, who tear-gassed them and beat them with batons.

Three years ago, in commemoration of the struggle for civil rights, I joined a pilgrimage led by my colleague Congressman JOHN LEWIS through many of the sites that were part of the fight for true equality here in America. We visited the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and on the wall of my office is a picture of the delegation, black, white, Asian and Latino, standing together in celebration of the sacrifices of those who marched there.

Standing there then and reflecting on the experience now, it is impossible to miss the transcendent importance of the unfettered right to vote. It was powerful enough then to garner the hatred of a mob of segregationists, and it inspires us now to continue to fight for reauthorization of the legislation and the full protections of our sacred franchise. I welcome a debate over the continuing vitality of the Voting Rights Act, but I deplore the delay which the Republican leadership's decision to pull the bill has occasioned.

In the decades since President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law, racial discrimination is still far too prevalent a feature of elections across the Nation from California to Florida. It is very true that significant progress has been made in the past 41 years since the VRA was first passed, and minority voters have a much greater voice in the political process today because of the Voting Rights Act. Despite that, after every election, we still hear stories of voter discrimination and intimidation, and we are reminded that this legislation remains important today, and we cannot let the provisions of the VRA expire.

These expiring provisions, pre-clearance of election law changes for jurisdictions with a history of discrimination, Federal observers at polls, and language assistance for limited English speakers, are still needed to ensure minority voting rights. It is evident to those from my State of California just how critical, for example, language assistance is for those with limited English skills.

We do not make our elections easy on voters. In a State where 135 candidates ran for Governor 3 years ago, it should be no surprise that during the 2004 general election, the California voter guidebook was nearly 200 pages. This guide included information on candidates and ballot measures that helped voters prepare for the election. Even native English speakers struggled to digest the ballot arguments in preparation for voting. For citizens with limited English proficiency, the task was all the more daunting.

I believe all U.S. citizens should learn the English language. It is the key to upward mobility in our society and a powerful common bond. Yet new citizens still learning the English language have the right to vote. Thankfully, due to the VRA, our polling sites provide language assistance so that all citizens can meaningfully participate in the election process, including new citizens still struggling to master the English language.

The right to vote for every American citizen is the foundation of our democracy. Unfortunately, there are still barriers to overcome, and we as a Nation must not give up on the protections that give content to that right. I am proud to support the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and will continue to do my part to ensure that the VRA remains effective and enforced. For this reason, Mr. Speaker, I call upon the leadership to take immediate action to bring this legislation to the floor for a vote.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. JONES of North Carolina addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

PLAN FOR IRAQ

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentlewoman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.